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ABSTRACT

An introductory textbook in English as a Second Language, commonly used in Egyptian schools, was evaluated for the degree to which its stated principles for classroom use of Arabic corresponded to instructions given in the lesson notes. A computer concordance program was used to extract relevant passages from the teacher's introduction and the lesson notes. It was found that classroom practice differs from the precepts in the book's introduction in four important ways: (1) Arabic is used frequently, an average of three times per unit; (2) the range of uses of Arabic is wider in the lesson notes than in the introduction; (3) the use of Arabic for the introduction of vocabulary is much more frequent and less systematic than would be expected given the restrictions placed on it in the instruction notes; and (4) the range of vocabulary items introduced using Arabic goes far beyond that suggested in the introduction. Given the intended use of the book and the intended teacher audience, it is proposed that the effectiveness and credibility of the textbook are reduced. It is also concluded that the textbook's recommended restrictions on Arabic use are excessive. A four-stage technique for improving teaching guides in this area is outlined. (MSE)

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THE USE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE - PRECEPT AND PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom use of the mother tongue is a sensitive issue in language teaching. Trainers and materials producers have condemned it since the days of audio-lingual teaching, as detrimental to good language learning. Although limited exceptions to this general rule are now accepted, the basic principle is still generally maintained amongst materials producers and trainers. Many teachers, however, find use of the mother tongue very seductive. The extent of this in Egypt, for example, can be judged from the "external books". "External books" are cribs, produced for supplementary use in class (where they provide additional exercises and examination practice) and at home (where they provide answers to workbook questions and other guidance). These books invariably make liberal use of the mother tongue, giving Arabic equivalents for vocabulary, translations of the reading texts in the student books, and so on. This practice is decried by the authors of the standard student books; but attempts to eradicate "external books" have proved so ineffective that the Ministry of Education now licenses them.

This conflict between what the teachers see as effective and the methods the experts demand that they use causes discomfort to both parties. Teachers, knowing they are not following directions, may doubt their skill as teachers, and the effectiveness of their teaching. Materials developers, feeling that their precepts are bound to be discounted, may state them more forcefully than they really intend. As a result, the guidance given to the teachers may not accurately reflect the procedures the authors themselves would actually use in teaching their own materials.

Perhaps the ideal way to test this hypothesis would be to compare the experts' precepts with their classroom practice. This is not often possible; actual classroom practice will not be seen in demonstration lessons, because these are a performance for an audience, rather than actual teaching. However, an approximation to it was achieved as part of a more extensive evaluation (reported in Kowitz and Carroll, 1989) of the teacher's book for Welcome to English, Book 1 (Bates and Higgins, 1986). Welcome to English Book 1 is the textbook in general use in Egyptian public schools in grade 6 (the first year of English). The evaluation of the teacher's book involved a number of linguistic and content analyses, including assessments of: the amount of specialized knowledge teachers were assumed to have; the adequacy of the definition in the teacher's guide of crucial terms (such as names of different lesson elements and teaching activities); the amount of teacher judgment required; and the linguistic complexity of the text as a whole.

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One of the topics covered was guidance given about the use of Arabic. It became clear in the course of this analysis that the book in fact contains two types of reference to Arabic and the use of the mother tongue:

1. General principles for the use of the mother tongue (in this case Arabic) are laid down, and specific recommendations are made for teachers to follow. These are found in the introduction to the book.

2. Specific instructions for the use of Arabic in particular situations are also given. These are found in the lesson notes which form the main body of the book.

The initial analysis had concentrated on the general principles in the introduction, and concluded that there was an adequate definition of the appropriate use of Arabic. Subsequent analysis, reported in this paper, addressed a different question - whether the principles given in the introduction are in fact those followed in the instructions given in the lesson notes.

METHOD

A computer concordancer, Micro-OCP, was used to locate all the occasions when "Arabic" and "translat*" (the asterisk indicates that all forms, such as "translate", translation", etc., were included) were used in the teacher's book. These were then excerpted, with as much context as necessary to give the sense. They were divided into two groups - those from the introduction (which give the general rules for the use of Arabic), and those from the lesson notes in the main body of the text (which give information about actual practice). These two groups were analyzed separately, and the results compared. In this way it is possible not only to analyze precept (i.e., the guidance in the introduction on how to use Arabic) but also compare it with the authors' actual recommended practice (by counting and classifying the occasions where use of Arabic is advocated in the lessons themselves). The comparison of the two will show whether practice and precept are consistent. For more information about Micro-OCP, see Hockey and Martin, (1987). For general information about applications of computer concordancers in ELT, see Carroll and Kowitz (1989).

FINDINGS (1) - PRECEPT

The introduction makes four main points about the use of Arabic:

1. Don't use Arabic to convey meaning

Teachers should avoid the use of Arabic to give meaning of new vocabulary:

> Meaning is conveyed by example - by real objects and actions or by pictures - or by description using language already known. Try to avoid using Arabic at this stage: merely saying the word and translating it does not have much impact on the student's memory and does not help him or her to apply it to English contexts. (introduction, p.v)

2. Use Arabic sparingly to check understanding of vocabulary

It is acceptable to use Arabic to check on students understanding of vocabulary that has recently been taught:

> However, Arabic may be used at a later stage, when you think students have grasped the meaning, to make sure that they have got it right. In other words, after you have presented the language, ask the students what they think it means. (introduction, p.v)

But caution is counselled:

> It is wrong to assume that a student who can remember and translate words in isolation has really learned the language. (introduction, p.v)

3. Draw attention to Arabic equivalents of fixed phrases

Arabic can be used to help students understand the meaning of new items; but only in a limited number of cases:

> With some greetings and questions, you can address students with the Arabic equivalent first, then give the English. (introduction, p.viii)

4. Arabic has limited contrastive use in teaching pronunciation

Teachers should attend especially to those elements of English that are not found in Arabic (these are specified):

> Certain sounds in English are unfamiliar to speakers of Arabic and particular attention should be given to their pronunciation: (introduction, p.x)

Therefore, the authors' views on the use of Arabic can be summed up as follows: do not use Arabic to introduce new language, except for "some greetings and questions"; use it sparingly to check understanding of vocabulary, remembering that it is an unreliable guide; and use contrastive analysis for identifying pronunciation items that need special attention. There is no suggestion that Arabic should be used in classroom management, or for checking comprehension of text.

FINDINGS (2) - PRACTICE

The restrictive precepts in the introduction about use of the mother tongue do not fully reflect the actual use of Arabic in the lesson notes. References to the use of Arabic in the lesson notes are frequent, and cover a wider range of uses than those allowed in the introduction. The appendix contains the complete concordance of all occurrences of "Arabic" and "translat*" found in the book, excluding the introduction. These have been summarized in table 1 below:

Table 1 - use of Arabic

Activity	Frequency
1. Introducing vocabulary	21
2. Checking understanding of vocabulary	5
3. Checking comprehension	2
4. Giving instructions/explaining activities	7
5. Giving complex background	6
6. As an integral part of activity	4
7. Students use Arabic	6

1. "Introducing vocabulary" in this table covers those cases where the authors say that an item is best explained in Arabic.

2. "Checking understanding of vocabulary" is self-explanatory. For example:

   You will need to use Arabic to explain "a present" and "I'm sorry", and anything else that Ss seem not to understand - but try to get the meaning across first by using gestures and actions. Then ask Ss for the Arabic expressions, to see if they have understood. (p.74)

3. "Checking comprehension" is similarly clear. For example:

   If necessary, use Arabic to make sure Ss understand the main points, i.e. that Bill's watch is broken; (p.148)

4. "Giving instructions/explaining activities" covers those cases where Arabic is used because the students' English is not yet good enough to understand the task presented in English, for example:

   But some (exercise types) will not be familiar. These may need explanation by the teacher, in Arabic if necessary. (p.90)

5. "Giving complex background" means using Arabic to give essential background that is too complex to explain in English, for example:

> This is a term of affection only, as he is not related to any of the other characters. You can explain this in Arabic. (p.104)

6. Where Arabic is used "as an integral part of activity", it is intrinsic to certain activities, for example:

> Present using BB (T-S): Present the idea of the exercise by writing some Arabic numbers on the BB, including some with zero in. Get Ss to come to the BB and say and write the English numbers under the Arabic ones. (p.26)

7. By "students use Arabic" is meant those cases where students can use Arabic in controlled situations if their English vocabulary is inadequate, for example:

> e) River Nile - the others are very near or small or "belong to me" (in Arabic) (p.139)

Because the number of occasions on which Arabic was used to introduce vocabulary (21 out of a total of 51 entries in table 1) was larger than expected, a summary was made of those cases where the item to be introduced using Arabic was specified. There were three main groups:

1. **Courtesy titles and fixed phrases**

> Miss (or Mrs or Mr). (p.2)
> Madam (or Sir): Headmistress (or Headmaster) (p.6)
>
> How are you today? (p.5)
> I'm fine, thanks. (p.6)
> I'm pleased to meet you. (p.27)
> Please (p.32)
> I'm sorry (p.74)

2. **Sentences/phrases for classroom use**

> Now, let's start the lesson. (p.2)
> She's at home. This is her desk. (p.14)
> Who's next? (p.15)
> What's she saying? (p.46)
> What's he/Bill saying? (p.63)

3. **Miscellaneous**

> and (p.6), in, also (p.11); Egyptian, British (p.26); a lesson, break, English names for the school lessons or subjects (p.152); a present (p.74), holidays, medicine (p.173)

Group 1 above includes most of the items (i.e., "some greetings and questions", p.viii) that the introduction says may be introduced using Arabic. Group 2 consists of sentences that are either typical of the classroom situation, or an integral part of a classroom activity; but there is no clear organizing principle behind them. Group 3 consists of single words, again without any clear organizing principle behind the selection of the items.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the above findings that in this case, actual classroom practice (as found in the lesson notes) differs in four important ways from the precepts in the introduction to the book:

1. Arabic is actually used quite frequently (use of Arabic is mentioned 51 times, an average of more than three times in each unit).

2. The range of uses to which Arabic is put is much wider in the lesson notes than in the introduction. Five of the seven uses in table 1 are not mentioned in the introduction:

   a. the teacher using Arabic to give instructions or to explain activities.

   b. the teacher using Arabic to give complex background that cannot easily be explained in English.

   c. Arabic used as an integral part of an activity.

   d. The use of Arabic by students.

   e. Using Arabic to check comprehension.

   The two uses that are discussed in the introduction represent a bare majority (26 out of 51) of the references to Arabic/translation in the lesson notes.

3. Use of Arabic for the introduction of new vocabulary is much more frequent and much less systematic than would be expected given the restrictions placed upon it in the introduction (21 out of 51 references to Arabic are to the introduction of new vocabulary).

4. The range of vocabulary items which are introduced using Arabic goes far beyond "some greetings and questions",as recommended on page viii of the introduction. It includes such items as "Madam", "Headmistress", "Please", "I'm sorry", "Now, let's start the lesson"; but also "What's she saying?", "and", "also", "Egyptian", "a lesson", "a present", "medicine".

The teachers for whom this teacher's guide is intended are in many ways very disadvantaged. They have limited English; many of them are what are called "non-specialists" - that is, qualified teachers whose specialist subject is not English. They may well lack recent training, and therefore be unfamiliar with the concepts on which modern teaching materials are based. They are also very short of preparation time, facilities and audio-visual aids. All of this makes them highly dependent on all forms of guidance; and the most readily available form of guidance for most of them is the teacher's book.

In such a situation, if practice is significantly different from precept, the effectiveness and the credibility of the book are reduced. If a teacher studies the introduction to find out how Arabic should be used, s/he will be given rules which are inconsistent with the classroom practice in the lesson notes. The most likely reaction to this is to disregard the introduction, and follow the lesson notes exactly. In this case, the teacher may learn inductively how to use Arabic in a situation not covered by the lesson notes; but there is no guarantee of this. Neither is there any source s/he can reliably turn to for guidance in case of doubt - and doubt is quite likely to arise, especially with respect to whether Arabic can be used to introduce a specific language item; although it is reasonably clear in what ways Arabic can be used in general, the rules governing which items should be introduced using Arabic are not clear or systematic. Therefore, use of Arabic for introduction of new language is dependent on the confidence, expertise and, utimately the unguided choice, of the teacher.

On the other hand, if the teacher follows the general rules in the introduction, use of Arabic will be excessively restricted. Her/his teaching may not suffer as a result, but s/he will be under restrictions that the course developers do not themselves accept. If they feel that it is appropriate to use Arabic in a given situation, the teachers should be free to do so, if they choose.

CONCLUSION

It not news to teachers that an expert making a general statement about good practice should not automatically be believed. Teachers know this intuitively; which is why they ask to see the experts in action, rather than listen to them saying how it should be done. However artificial a demonstration lesson may be, it will still be better than talk. It is interesting, but not necessarily important, to have documentary evidence that experts do not always follow their own rules.

In order to go beyond this simple conclusion, it is necessary that statements of rationale have a value beyond the purely formal. If this is the case, then their purpose is to

guide the teacher in situations which are not explicitly covered in the lesson notes. This guidance will be especially necessary for the teacher who has limited experience or reading in the area of teaching methodology. There two basic types of situation where teachers will need such guidance:

1. If a particular technique is inconvenient under existing classroom conditions, this will be an incentive to adapt the technique to the classroom. If the teacher is not convinced of the reasons for following the technique, expediency will triumph.

2. If students' language knowledge, or understanding of an activity type, is more limited than the textbook writer assumes, then the teacher will have to decide how to handle the situation. Unless the teacher knows why particular procedures are used, s/he will not be able to respond in a predictable way.

In order to cope with either of these eventualities, the teacher needs to have grasped the rationale underlying the teaching technique. Some teachers will do this inductively. The teacher's guide - and particularly the statement of rationale - is aimed at those teachers who do not. Such teachers will easily be confused by inconsistencies, and will not have the confidence to reject them. Therefore, the rationale should be simply and clearly stated, and easy to follow. If the course developers, in trying to make the rules clear, give rules that they would not follow in real life, teachers who follow the rules will get into difficulties - and the teacher who follows the rules will be the least able to cope.

In providing the evidence of inconsistencies, the computer concordancer also provides the evidence needed to write a new statement of rationale. This rationale, by using the lesson notes as source material, automatically follows actual practice. In the present case, the statement on how to use Arabic could be something like the following:

> Arabic can be used for introducing vocabulary according to the instructions. Cases where this is appropriate include courtesy titles (such as "Miss", "Mrs" or "Mr", "Madam" or "Sir"); phrases, (such as "How are you today?" or "I'm pleased to meet you."); sentences or phrases for classroom use, (such as "Now, let's start the lesson", or "Who's next?"); and other items such as "and", "in", "also", "Egyptian", "British", "a lesson", "break", "a present", "holidays" and "medicine". Arabic can also be used for checking understanding of vocabulary and comprehension - but it should not be used too often, because a student who can remember and translate words in isolation has not actually learned the language.

> Arabic is also used for giving instructions and explaining activities that are too complex for the students to understand if instructions are given only in English. Examples of this are on pages 3, 4, 9, 16 and 32. Arabic is also used to give background which is useful, but too complex to explain in English. Examples of this are found on pages 16, 43, 104 and 106. There are also certain activities which involve using Arabic, for example those on pages 24, 26, 28 and 49. Finally. Students use Arabic in cases where they cannot yet answer in English - for example on pages 139, 164, 188 and 194.

Such a statement would be an improvement on the original, because it reflects the course developers' actual practice. However, it is still not an ideal statement of rationale. The most obvious area for improvement is the list of language items that can be introduced using Arabic. This should be based on a set of principles; but in its present form, there is little logic to it. It would be better to classify the items into groups, and say just why each group should be introduced using Arabic; but a good grouping cannot be derived from the present data. Therefore, two types of revision are needed - first, revision of the summary, to give it a more logical foundation; then revision of the lesson notes, to give them greater internal consistency, and to reflect the principles in the summary.

This suggests a powerful four-stage technique for improving teacher's guides:

1. Materials developers, having produced the textbook, should write the lesson notes for the teacher's guide.

2. A content analysis should then be done, to gather the data which will be summarized for the statement of rationale. A computer concordancer can be used to facilitate this.

3. The summary should then be drafted, and revised until it reflects the writers' views on methdology, as well as the evidence of the lesson notes.

4. When the summary is in an acceptable form, the materials developers should go back to the lesson notes, and revise them to make them consistent with the final version of the summary.

In this way, the statement of rationale will be closer to actual practice; and the lesson notes will be consistent with the developers' views on methodology. The statement of rationale therefore becomes a much more useful document, because it reflects the course developers' agreed practice.

This paper, although it describes one case, taken from one book, has general implications. If the same technique were applied to other books, the findings would be similar in many cases. The technique suggested would help to remove such inconsistencies, and offers a way to make significant improvements in the usefulness of teacher's guides. It also shows the effectiveness of the computer concordancer as an editorial tool, which could be applied to any word-processed text. Therefore, it merits serious consideration, and application on a wider scale.

NOTE

Paper presented at National Symposium on English Teaching in Egypt (10th, March 20 to 22 1990, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt.)

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APPENDIX

COMPLETE LIST OF USES OF MOTHER TONGUE FOUND IN THE BOOK

1. **Giving instructions where students' English is inadequate:**

(In the early stages) explain (activities) in Arabic (p. 3, p.4)

Present new words (T-C): Ask Ss, in Arabic, to try and guess the meanings of the new words (i.e. brother, father, cat) with the help of the pictures. (p. 9)

T-C Explain this in Arabic if necessary, and/or do the first row on the BB to show what is required. (p.16)

They must join up the dots (say this in English, then in Arabic) (p.32)

T-C Ask Ss in Arabic to tell you what picture 1 on SB page 55 is of (p.121)

But some (exercise types) will not be familiar. These may need explanation by the teacher, in Arabic if necessary (p.90)

T-C Ss look at the pictures while you read out sentences 1-11 (below). They find the picture that matches each sentence. Oral: explain in Arabic. (p.91)

2. **Giving essential background too complex to explain in English:**

Present the exercise (T-C): Explain in Arabic, if necessary, that these are simple sums of addition and subtraction. (p.16)

Explain in Arabic that in English the big letters are used at the beginning of names (you can give examples: Ali, Aswan, etc.) and of words at the beginning of sentences. (p.42)

Reading skills include the skill of trying to guess, from the context, what a word means. For example, in this lesson the capital (of Egypt) is something that Ss may be able to guess. But, of course, if they cannot guess a word, you will tell them the meaning. Explain these aims, in Arabic. Explain also that each part-sentence on the left is to be completed by one of the part-sentences on the right (which are in the wrong order). (p.103)

This is a term of affection only, as he is not related to any of the other characters. You can

explain this in Arabic. (p.104)

Explain the story briefly in Arabic. (p.106)

T-C Introduce the topic of puppets - what they are made of and how they work - by asking Ss what they know about puppets. You will have to do this in Arabic, but it will prepare Ss for their reading activity. (p.201)

3. **Arabic intrinsic to certain activities**

First, ask Ss to say in Arabic what they think has happened in this scene. (p.24)

Present using BB (T-S): Present the idea of the exercise by writing some Arabic numbers on the BB, including some with zero in. Get Ss to come to the BB and say and write the English numbers under the Arabic ones. (p.26)

This is a name in English. Write the name in Arabic.
Present the exercise
T-C: Write Salim on the Bb and say:
T: this is a name in English. Write this name in Arabic.
Then write Salim in Arabic on the BB
Write Hassan on the BB. Ask a S to Bb and say: Write this name in Arabic. Hassan. (p.28)

In this activity Ss have to put in the missing letters and figures, using their knowledge of the alphabet and numbers in English and also the Arabic names and numbers as prompts. (p.49)

4. **Checking understanding of lexis:**

Check if they have understood by asking them to translate into Arabic. (p.57)

Ask them for the Arabic, to check if they have understood. (p.88)

Deal with the new words as you come to them. See if Ss have guessed them (e.g. low means something like down or near the land). They can give the Arabic for the word if that's the only way. (p.145)

5. **Checking comprehension:**

But when you finish reading, ask questions in Arabic to see how much Ss have understood: (p.76)

If necessary, use Arabic to make sure Ss understand the main points, i.e. that Bill's watch is broken; (p.148)

6. **Vocabulary best explained in Arabic:**

Explain with translation T-C Now, let's start the lesson. (p.2)

Explain with translation T-C Miss (or Mrs or Mr). (p.2)

Present with translation T-C How are you today? (p.5)

Present and explain the translation T-C I'm fine, thanks. (p.6)

Present with translation T-C Madam (or Sir): Headmistress (or Headmaster) (p.6)

Present with translation T-C Explain the meaning of "and". (p.6)

Then present, with translation, "in" and "also". (p.11)

Present with translation (SHE'S AT HOME. THIS IS HER DESK.) (p.14)

Explain in Arabic the meaning of Who's next? (p.15)

Present using translation (T-C): Explain in Arabic the meanings of the new words (i.e., Egyptian, British). (p.26)

Translate and present: I'm pleased to meet you. (p.27)

"Please" can best be taught by explaining in Arabic. (p.32)

And you can tell them what the words are - and translate them - once they have finished their writing. (p.45)

T: Picture number seven. What's she saying? (Translate this.) (p.46)

(Translate What's he/Bill saying?) (p.63)

You will need to use Arabic to explain "a present" and "I'm sorry", and anything else that Ss seem not to understand - but try to get the meaning across first by using gestures and actions. Then ask Ss for the Arabic expressions, to see if they have understood. (p.74)

The pictures will help them and you should use gestures and actions as well. (But if there is something that Ss really cannot understand, explain or translate it.) (p.78)

Also, explain (in Arabic if necessary) any new words they have failed to guess the meaning of. (p.103)

T-C Present "a lesson" and "break" and the English names for the school lessons or subjects, using the SB pictures and translation if necessary. (p.152)

T-C After Ss have read the text once, read it aloud to them. Ask them to say which characters are described in it. Then explain or translate any words that Ss have not understood - but remember they are receptive, so they do not need to be learnt at this stage. (p.171)

T-C Present the new words (holidays, medicine, etc.), using the pictures but also translation if necessary. (p.173)

7. **Students use Arabic where their English is inadequate:**

e) River Nile - the others are very near or small or "belong to me" (in Arabic) (p.139)

They should be able to guess the meanings - and tell you them in Arabic - even if they cannot read the words. Tell them the words in English. (p.160)

Ask Ss, in Arabic, what time of year each picture shows. When they tell you, tell them the English words (p.164)

T: And what's it called?
S4: I don't know. (But Ss can give its name in Arabic.) (p.188)

They do not yet know the words for a number of the things shown in it. So they should use the Arabic word:
S2: Now I can see a ("policeman" in Arabic).
When Ss use the Arabic for one of the words in the list above, present the English word. (p.194)

Then ask Ss to tell you, if they can, the meaning of any new words, in English or in Arabic. Explain any word that they have not guessed. (p.198)